

Danny Yadron, *Wall Street Journal*

When Republicans targeted public broadcasting following the GOP wave of 1994, Democrats brought in Bert and Ernie from "Sesame Street" to testify before Congress.

On Wednesday, amid new calls to defund public broadcasting, they turned to Arthur, the animated aardvark from PBS television station. Arthur showed up at a press conference outside the U.S. Capitol.

"We can't leave Arthur and his pals in the lurch," said Rep. Edward Markey (D., Mass.) while standing next Arthur - well, a person in an Arthur costume. "Public broadcasting is an electronic oasis for learning in what has been called the vast wasteland of commercial television."

Mr. Markey and group of Democrats seek to restore federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to the massive spending bill being debated in the House. The House Republicans' spending bill for the remainder of the current fiscal year would eliminate federal funds for the CPB, which had been on track to receive \$430 million for the year ending Sept. 30.

Conservatives have long sought to cut federal funding for public broadcasting, saying it's a misuse of taxpayer dollars and that its programming often tilts to the left. If a station is worth running, they say, it should be financially self-sufficient. Democrats often counter that public broadcasting produces good journalism, or that the radio and television stations are a public service to rural areas.

Their fallback argument: Kids love Sesame Street. Other props on hand Wednesday included stuffed miniatures of Big Bird and Grover, along with a poster of Bert and Ernie holding a pink slip. Rep. Betty McCollum (D., Minn.) brought along her own Elmo toy.

"Do we want to live in a society where the only characters that appear on television are the ones that gross the highest profits?" asked Rep. Nita Lowey (D., N.Y.), who invited the two Muppets to Capitol Hill in 1995. "I thought we resolved this issue a few years ago."

Former GOP Sen. Rick Santorum, a possible 2012 presidential candidate, said Monday that he was doubtful Republican lawmakers could overcome the "Barney" and "Sesame Street" lobbies. The CPB has asked for \$440 million for fiscal 2012, beginning Oct. 1, and \$460 million for the following fiscal year.

"Arthur, we thank you," Mr. Markey said in closing. "Your silence is eloquent."